



## TECHNOLOGY

# Pedestrian death rise blamed on iPods

By DAMIEN MURPHY - Sydney Morning Herald Last updated 10:13 06/09/2010

Death by iPod is being blamed as a contributing factor to the 25 per cent rise in the number of pedestrian fatalities in the Australian state of New South Wales.

The "iPod zombie trance" people get into when walking, driving or pedalling around listening to their mobile devices is being blamed for an increase in collisions and even deaths in Europe and the US.

The issue has been highlighted in Sydney by the death of a 46-year-old Glebe woman reportedly wearing headphones when she was knocked down and killed by an ambulance on Saturday night.

There is speculation she might not have heard the ambulance siren when crossing Parramatta Road at Mallett Street at Camperdown.

She was one of at least six pedestrians hit by vehicles on state roads over the weekend, including a 34-year-old man who died after being hit by a bus in Leumeah early yesterday morning. Although the number of people killed on NSW roads so far this calendar year has dropped, pedestrian deaths have climbed by 25 per cent to 53, compared to 44 for the same period last year.

Harold Scruby, of the Pedestrian Council of Australia, said research into deaths resulting from people not paying attention to traffic while using mobile devices was scant in NSW.

"'Death by iPod' is a relatively new phenomenon so it may be slow in showing up because it can sometimes be a year between the fatality and the coroner's finding," he said. "But we should be asking ourselves why are total road deaths declining while pedestrian fatalities continue to escalate? Maybe listening devices could be part of the explanation."

Distracted pedestrians who cause accidents are liable for a A\$100 (\$127) fine and face jail on more serious charges but latest NSW policy figures last year show there were 406 fines issued to pedestrians not paying attention to road safety.

In an endeavour to educate the public, the Pedestrian Council's "lambs to the slaughter - wait for the green" campaign featuring a group of pedestrians wearing sheep heads and listening to mobiles and iPods has appeared in newspapers and a billboard.

But Mr Scruby said the rise in the popularity of iPods and other listening devices illustrated an urgent need for action by state government and manufacturers.

"The government is quite happy to legislate that people can lose two demerit points for having music up too loud in their cars, but is apparently unconcerned that listening devices now appear to have become lethal pieces of entertainment," he said. "They should legislate appropriate penalties for people acting so carelessly towards their own welfare and that of others."

"Manufacturers ... should be made to [warn] consumers of the risks they run."

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TRAVEL

## How to avoid dying in a plane crash

Reuters Last updated 09:48 07/09/2010

Flying in the developing world is 13 times more dangerous than flying in first world countries, according to a new study.

Arnold Barnett, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management and a researcher on aviation safety, calculated that the odds of dying on a scheduled flight in first world countries such as Canada and Japan are one in 14 million.

But he found that flying in emerging nations such as India and Brazil leads to a one in 2 million chance of death per flight. Lesser developed countries, such as many found in Africa and in Latin America, were found to have a crash rate of one in 800,000.

Barnett, who based his findings on air safety data, said Nigeria had an especially poor safety record.

"It does seem to be the case that there are differences in mortality risk, which existed before and exist now," Barnett said. "Even in countries such as Singapore and Hong Kong, with first world incomes and quality of life, the statistical safety record is closer to that of still developing countries. They haven't caught up."

But despite the wide gap between developing and developed country, Barnett said "the good news is that safety seems to be increasing all over the world, and that's the most important metric of all."

Barnett, whose findings were published in *Transportation Science*, a journal published by the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS), theorizes that cultural factors such as individualism and deference to authority may explain the different accident rates.

"Deference to authority is important. If someone sees the captain doing something screwy, in some places they'd ask what they were doing. In some they would not. Individualism is important also. If something goes wrong, people in countries with greater individualism try to fix the problem, rather than just do what they are asked," he said.

Barnett, who became interested in airline safety because of his own fear of flying, found little reason for airline travelers to fear flying, whether in the third world or the first.

"Personally, I am still a little bit nervous about flying. But it's not rational. The numbers are extremely comforting. It's silly to be frightened of flying if you aren't frightened of going to the grocery store and having the ceiling collapse," he said.



## LIFE &amp; STYLE

## Men have more senior moments

Reuters Last updated 13:43 07/09/2010

Lost the car keys? Forgot someone's name? Many elderly people suffer slight cognitive problems but men are more likely than women to suffer momentary memory lapse or senior moments, according to a US study.

Researchers from the Mayo Alzheimer's Disease Research Center in Rochester, Minnesota, found 19 percent of men aged 70 to 89 years had so-called mild cognitive impairment, compared to only 14 percent of women.

People with mild cognitive impairment have problems with memory but can carry out everyday activities and generally realise that they're forgetful. The National Institutes of Health says "mild cognitive impairment" falls in between normal forgetfulness and dementia.

Researcher Dr. Ronald Petersen said the findings were surprising because Alzheimer's disease, which is preceded by this type of mental decline, affects more women than men.

Even after accounting for differences in education, age, and diseases like diabetes and hypertension, men had about 50 percent higher odds than women of having mild cognitive impairment.

"The gender differences were somewhat surprising to us because most people believe that women are at higher risk than men," Petersen told Reuters Health.

He said not everyone with mild cognitive impairment develops dementia but some people do which makes it a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease.

An estimated 15 percent of people with mild cognitive impairment end up with full-blown dementia each year. In the general population, that number is between one and two percent.

The study, published in the journal *Neurology* involved more than 2,000 randomly sampled elderly people from Olmsted County, Minnesota.

The researchers spent hours testing each participant specifically for mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

About a quarter of the seniors had cognitive problems beyond the signs of normal aging, including Alzheimer's.

Mild impairment became more common with older age but it also turned out that the more education people had under their belt, the less likely they were to have cognitive problems.

Petersen said it was unclear how to explain the finding.

The researchers speculated that perhaps men get memory problems earlier in life, but then decline more slowly than women. In other words, the reason more men have mild cognitive impairment might be that more women are skipping that stage and going directly to dementia.

While there aren't any drugs available to treat mild cognitive impairment, Petersen said lifestyle changes could have a positive effect.

He recommended reading and going to the movies, as well as keeping up with friends and family, eating



healthy foods and being physically active.

"There are more and more data coming out indicating that some of these lifestyle modifications may work," he said.

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## Christchurch earthquake will see long-term GDP rise

By Brian Fallow

**5:30 AM** Tuesday Sep 7, 2010

The economic impact of the Canterbury earthquake will be sharply negative in the near term but probably positive for gross domestic product over a longer period, economists say.

Canterbury is home to 13 per cent of the population and contributes 15 per cent of national GDP.

The immediate impact is loss of activity in businesses which are closed or whose operations will be disrupted.

ASB chief economist Nick Tuffley said a rough rule of thumb is that every week Canterbury operated at half its normal capacity would shave roughly 0.14 percentage points of GDP.

"Four weeks running at an average of half capacity would impact GDP by 0.6 percentage points, largely offsetting growth elsewhere in the economy."

Over a longer period, the impact on GDP is likely to be positive, on the grounds that \$2 billion, say, of damage represents close to \$2 billion of additional demand, in rebuilding, repairing and replacing what was damaged.

Bank of New Zealand head of research Stephen Toplis said that as it turned out, if such a disaster had to happen it could not have happened at a better time.

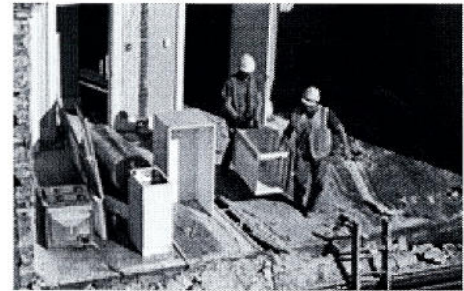
"The building sector should have significant spare capacity as activity levels have been clobbered by the current economic malaise," he said.

"If it had happened a few years back the industry would have had no capacity to respond and the ability for suppliers to significantly hike prices would have been great."

On the supply side, damage to productive capacity is still being assessed. Agriculture Minister David Carter has warned that while some damage to milking sheds is immediately apparent, it may take a while for any damage to the infrastructure supporting irrigation to be identified.

As for damage to factories, UBS New Zealand economist Robin Clements, who lives in Christchurch, does not expect it to be extensive, based on which parts of the city have borne the brunt.

Likewise, while some international visitors might be put off by news of the disaster, Clements expects that effect to be fairly short-term.



The earthquake in Christchurch will mean more work for the building sector, which has plenty of spare capacity. Photo / Greg Bowker

But Tuffley said that if specialised equipment was damaged it would take time to replace it, especially if it had to be imported.

NZIER principal economist Shamubeel Eaqub pointed to the risk that if supplies to customers were disrupted they could take their business elsewhere – just as some New Zealand seafood exporters had benefited from the air freight disruptions when Iceland's volcano blew.

ANZ chief economist Cameron Bagrie highlighted the hit to confidence, which had already been slipping for five months, albeit from respectable levels, and the need for policymakers to demonstrate leadership and willingness to act – or, in the case of the Reserve Bank, not to act. The markets now regard it as near certain it will leave the official cash rate where it is on September 16.

Those with experience of other natural disasters know that the process of clean-up and repair is stressful, depressing and feels as if it takes forever. This is not positive for consumer sentiment.

Clements said people would not be rushing out to spend while they were worrying about how much their repair bill was going to be and when their insurance claims would be settled.

"But I wouldn't overplay that. It is not as if there had been widespread death and injury."

Prime Minister John Key said the Government had spoken to banks and Inland Revenue to stress the need for some forbearance for businesses, whose cash flow would be disrupted.

Eaqub said some of the jobs lost by a higher-than-usual rate of business failure would be in sectors other than those which would be boosted by the rebuilding effort. The demand which had been met by those enterprises would not necessarily seamlessly or swiftly flow on to others.

Economists said that while GDP would show the impact of the disruption and rebuilding on expenditure and production, it would not pick up the significant loss of wealth caused by the earthquake.

"This bill will be borne largely by the Earthquake Commission and private insurers for private damage, and by central and local government for public infrastructure," Tuffley said.

The cost of damage to uninsured assets, like roads and water infrastructure, probably ran into hundreds of millions of dollars. Historically, the lion's share of the cost of repairing or replacing those assets after a natural disaster – Cyclone Bola, for example – was met by the Crown.

– *Brian Fallow*

#### STATISTICS REPORTS DELAYED

Statistics New Zealand is delaying the release of a number of its statistical reports this week because two of its offices in Christchurch remain closed in the wake of Saturday's powerful earthquake.

But at this stage it hopes to release the Gross Domestic Product and Balance of Payments reports later this month as expected.

The Economic Survey of Manufacturing for the June quarter and value of building work in place for June are deferred until further notice.

They were due to be released tomorrow.

Electronic card transactions data for August is also deferred from its release date of Thursday. The Accommodation Survey for July, due on Friday, is deferred until further notice.

The Wholesale Trade Survey for the June quarter will be released as scheduled today and the Overseas Trade Index (volumes) and Overseas Trade Index (prices) will both be released as scheduled on Friday.

– *NZPA*

By Brian Fallow

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